

Biodiversity and Climate Change Adaptation Seminar

Questions to the Panel

Panel: Tony Richardson (RSPB), Olly Watson (RSPB), Colin Studholme (Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust), Simon Bates (Natural England), Helen Mann (National Trust), Katherine (Plymouth City Council)
Chaired by Phil Collins (Natural England)

1. Are BAP targets now just a millstone?

Olly: No. BAP targets are a very useful pointer towards what it is that we need to conserve. However, there is a continuous need to revise the targets, strategies and actions. They are still useful for next few decades, but Government funding is needed.

Some species will reach the point in the future where it is necessary to cease conservation focus because we can't keep spending resources, but this will not be for at least 3 – 4 decades. It is important that we keep a positive view by building strong populations that are more resilient to the impacts of climate change. Additionally, the Climate Map scenarios do not necessarily pick up on microclimates – species may therefore survive outside the modelled climate space.

Q: BAPs are too prescriptive and numerous and the costs of a species focus approach are too high. We need to focus on broader habitats.

Simon: The BAP process is ineffective because there is too much focus on nationally derived targets. Conversations need to be rekindled locally.

Naomi: This problem is being addressed by the new England Biodiversity Strategy in terms of connectivity and ecosystems. And BAP targets are becoming more flexible.

Colin: It is important to involve communities in biodiversity conservation and this is much easier to achieve with a species, rather than habitat, focus.

2. When do we give up on a species?

Olly: Only when biological monitoring/natural processes tell us that the species is on the brink of extinction. We cannot rely on computer modelling and future predictions and give up on species just because predictions say so. From a climate change perspective, we are not there yet. Species extinction in the UK is fairly limited and species loss is not likely for another 10-20 years.

3. Given the uncertainties, should we abandon attempts to predict the climate and what might happen?

Simon: Don't give up on the science. UKCIP is leading the field in terms of climate prediction and, providing it is used sensibly in a way that recognises the uncertainties, it can be used effectively.

4. With climate change rising up the agenda, is the profile of biodiversity and conservation high enough?

Tony: It does have a good profile. Today alone, there are 3 conferences on climate change in the region, 2 of which are related to biodiversity. However, it is worrying that other issues (i.e. current economic concerns) may push biodiversity and climate change lower down the agenda. Generally, awareness and interest is high, but we need to keep up the focus so that the issue is not forgotten in times of other concerns.

Simon: Climate change offers biodiversity an opportunity to raise its profile and win arguments with developers. We also need to emphasise the benefits of biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation to humans in order to raise the profile. Though it is difficult to quantify biodiversity losses and gains, we need to try. The Environment Agency's Flood Risk Management Team have already started to assess the cost benefits of biodiversity in relation to flood risk management.

Katherine: To keep it on the agenda, we need to give biodiversity some real value by putting it into a 'financial-speak' framework.

Q: There is a problem with language and understanding in relation to the sector. Using the word 'biodiversity' does not initiate interest from the wider community. We need to use language appropriate for communicating with the public and wider decisions makers. We also need to ensure that biodiversity appears on Local Authority targets.

5. How can we improve designated sites and connectivity when there is little research on how to do this and what is effective?

Katherine: We do not necessarily need pure scientific evidence before we can act, but can use common sense as well. Pure science can be improved in time but should not be used as an excuse to delay action.

Olly: There is a need for common sense, but we do also need more research because what we might think promote connectivity may be different to what some species actually require. More research is needed as there is limited understanding of what species need to disperse.

6. How can our organisations influence the way that agriculture adapts?

Helen: The National Trust can showcase good practice and evaluate, monitor and learn from what has already been done. The National Trust is in a good position to do this as it can experiment with methods on its own land.

Colin: The Severn Vale Living Landscapes project included a workshop held on a farm, focussing on soil compaction issues. This introduced biodiversity to farmers in a language that they can understand. We need to remove barriers and move outside lines drawn on maps.

Olly: In 3 ways:

- 1) The uplands project is focused at a landscape scale with farmers and is addressing low land and upland farming issues.

- 2) Agri-environment schemes have made lots of successes in this area e.g. has helped to reduce the grazing of livestock on uplands. We now need to focus on what is needed from these schemes in the future.
- 3) We need to increase the role of the UK as a 'bread basket' to produce for the population, the UK will become more important for food production as climate change damages production in other areas. We need to be realistic as to what society needs from agriculture, so that areas can be fit for farming and biodiversity.

Tony: We need more partnership working as we are all working towards the same aims. It is not necessarily a case of one side of an argument or the other.

Delegate: There is concern about biodiversity experts opposed to 'ordinary' farming which is intensive and damaging to biodiversity.

Colin: The model capacity of Nature Map means we need to leave some areas for intensive agriculture and not biodiversity.

7. How do we achieve lasting improvements for biodiversity? Giving 1 key point each

Tony: We need to improve messages put out by the media. This is all about the planet and we all need to do our bit. Partnership working is essential.

Olly: We need to mitigate against climate change because an increase over 4°C is not adaptable to. We need to do more of what we are already doing.

Colin: There is opportunity to monitor and evaluate how effective wildlife highways and corridors are. We need to encourage Natural England to develop targets for colonisation of the wider countryside to spread species out of designated sites.

Simon: We need a clear vision and to articulate ideas visually in order to win over the public and gain support.

Helen: A little less talk and a lot more action!

Katherine: We need to improve links between issues e.g. health and wellbeing and use of open spaces in order to gain increased support and funding.